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EQUALITY CALIFORNIA'S HISTORIC DOMESTIC PARTNER RIGHTS BILL PASSES CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY

*AB 205 Extends Significant Rights & Responsibilities to Protect **All** Families*

SACRAMENTO - Equality California, California's statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organization, today celebrates the passage in the state Assembly of its groundbreaking legislation that would grant same-sex couples nearly all the state rights, benefits, and responsibilities currently granted only to spouses under state law. The measure, Assembly Bill (AB) 205, proposed and sponsored by Equality California and carried by Assemblymember Jackie Goldberg (D-Los Angeles), passed the lower house on a vote of 41-32. It now goes to the state Senate for consideration.

"This is a historic civil rights victory for California's – and the nation's – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities," said Geoffrey Kors, Executive Director of Equality California. "AB 205 is not marriage, and it is not full equality, but it is a momentous and significant step forward for the LGBT civil rights movement. By passing AB 205, the Assembly has recognized that *all* families face the same difficulties the same joys, and the same tragedies."

Equality California is joined in supporting AB 205 by a broad coalition of civil rights, labor, religious, and senior organizations. The bill is also supported by Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, Attorney General Bill Lockyer, and Secretary of State Kevin Shelley.

According to recent census data, one in six of the nation's same-sex couples resides in California. Significant new rights and duties would be granted to registered domestic partners under AB 205 including child custody and child support obligations, the right to make funeral arrangements, financial support, joint filing of state income taxes, and mutual responsibility for debts. A UCLA study released May 27 found that the measure would save the state at least \$8 to \$10 million per year, mainly due to savings from considering the income of both partners in determining eligibility for government benefit programs. Nearly 20,000 same-sex and senior opposite-sex couples had registered with the state as of May 2003.

Despite extreme pressure from anti-gay activists, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Californians and their allies from across the state expressed their strong support of AB 205. In the last five days alone, nearly 14,000 e-mails were generated from EQCA's online Action Alert center in support of the bill. Assemblymembers also received thousands of phone calls and faxes urging them to support civil rights for LGBT Californians.

In the lengthy floor debate on the measure, 11 Democrats spoke in support, while 7 Republicans spoke against it. Assemblymember John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) spoke eloquently in favor of AB 205, noting that the vote “is about that great tide and sweep of history.” Author Goldberg concluded the debate by saying that AB 205 “is first, last, and only about equal protection under the law. We should not accept anything less.”

“Today, the California Assembly has spoken out against discrimination, and in favor of valuing *all* California families,” said Kors. “Tens of thousands of California families need this bill – to protect their children, to protect against crises, to believe in the future. Equality California applauds every Assemblymember who voted for equality today by supporting AB 205. Our community will remember those votes.”

The final vote tally was as follows:

41 Ayes (all Democrats): Berg, Bermúdez, Calderon, Canciamilla, Chan, Chu, Cohn, Corbett, Diaz, Dutra, Dymally, Firebaugh, Frommer, Goldberg, Hancock, Jackson, Kehoe, Koretz, Laird, Leno, Levine, Lieber, Liu, Longville, Lowenthal, Montañez, Mullin, Nakano, Nation, Negrete McLeod, Nuñez, Oropeza, Pavley, Ridley-Thomas, Simitian, Steinberg, Vargas, Wesson, Wiggins, Wolk, Yee

32 Noes (all Republicans): Aghazarian, Bates, Benoit, Bogh, Campbell, Cogdill, Cox, Daucher, Dutton, Garcia, Harman, Haynes, Shirley Horton, Houston, Keene, La Malfa, La Suer, Leslie, Maddox, Maldonado, Maze, McCarthy, Mountjoy, Nakanishi, Pacheco, Plescia, Richman, Runner, Samuelian, Spitzer, Strickland, Wyland

7 Not Voting (all Democrats): Chavez, Correa, Jerome Horton, Matthews, Parra, Reyes, Salinas

Founded in 1998, Equality California (formerly CAPE) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots-based, statewide advocacy organization whose mission is to ensure the dignity, safety, equality and civil rights of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Californians. Equality California is one of the largest and fastest growing statewide LGBT organizations in the country. We can be contacted through our website at www.eqca.org.

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